

Message Text

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ACTION NODS-00

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /001 W
-----080202 181028Z /12

O 171451Z AUG 77 ZFF-4
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4462

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 4 DAMASCUS 5276

NODIS

FOR SECRETARY FROM MURPHY

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, SY, KUS
SUBJECT: MESSAGE TO PRESIDENT ASSAD FROM PRESIDENT CARTER

REF: STATE 192565

1. SUMMARY:

ASSAD AGREES IN PRINCIPLE TO FURNISH TREATY LANGUAGE
BY END OF AUGUST, BUT I DID NOT GET ABSOLUTE COMMITMENT
HE WILL DO SO. HE IS STRUCK BY OUR STRESS ON THE TERM
"PEACE TREATY" VICE "PEACE AGREEMENT" WHICH HE SAYS IS
NORMAL SYRIAN FORMULATION AAND WILL EXAMINE LEGAL IMPLICA-
TIONS OF EACH TERM. HE IS CONVINCED RECENT ISRAELI MOVES
SIGNIFY A CLEAR INTENTION TO ANNEX THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES.
HE ASSERTS IMPLEMENTATION OF SHTAURA AGREEMENT HAS PROCEEDED
WELL AND WILL CONTINUE IN ACCORDANCE SCHEDULE AGREED UPON
BY THE GOL, SYRIA AND PALESTINAINS. SAID HE IS GETTING NO
SIGNAL FROM LEBANESE LEADERSHIP REQUESTING FURTHER
SYRIAN ACTION TO STOP PALESTINAIN MILITARY ACTIVITY.
HE ACKNOWLEDGED CERTAIN PALESTINIAN ARMED ELEMENTS MAY
STILL NOT BE UNDER FULL CONTROL OF CENTRAL PALESTINIAN
COMMAND BUT INSISTED LATTER INTENDS SEE RAPID IMPLEMENTATION

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OF SHTAURA AGREEMENT. PROBLEM IS PALESTINAINS WANT TO
HAND THEIR STRONGPOINTS OVER TO LEBANESE ARMY WHICH
STILL UNREADY FOR THIS RESPONSIBILITY. THERE IS SOME
RISK THAT CERTAIN LEBANESE EXTREMISTS COOPERATING WITH
ISRALIS MAY OPPOSE INSERTION REGULAR LEBANESE FORCES
IN SOUTT, BUT MAJOR IMPEDIMENT TO STABILITY IN SOUTH
COMES FROM ISRAEL WHICH SEEKS KEEP CONDITIONS STIRRED

UP ON SOUTH. SAID HE STILL PREPARED CARRY OUT HIS EARLIER OFFER TO SARKIS AND SEND SYRIAN TROOPS TO SOUTH. I MADE CLEAR MESSAGE WE WERE GETTING WAS REQUEST FOR SYRIAN POLITICAL ACTION TO REIN IN PALESTINIANS AND DEFINITELY NOT RPT NOT FOR SYRIAN TROOPS. END SUMMARY

2. HAD TWO HOUR MEETING WITH ASSAD AT HIS HOME UNTIL MIDNIGHT AUGUST 16. AFTER READING ALOUD PRESIDENT CARTER'S LETTER, I OBSERVED THAT HIS DECISION TO MEET WITH FONMIN KHADDAM AND WITH EACH OF THE OTHER FOREIGN MINISTERS IN SEPTEMBER SHOWED CARTER'S CONTINUED DETERMINATION TO ENGAGE HIMSELF AND THE PRESTIGE OF HIS OFFICE IN THE PEACE PROCESS. HE COULD HAVE DELEGATED THE SEPTEMBER MEETINGS ENTIRELY TO SECRETARY VANCE BUT HAD CHOSEN TO ACT OTHERWISE. ASSAD SAID HE UNDERSTOOD AND WELCOMED THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS COMMITMENT. I THEN NOTED THE LEAD TIME FRAME FOR THE REQUESTED TREATY LANGUAGE WAS SHORT. IT MEANT SYRIA AND THE OTHER PARTIES SHOULD SUBMIT THEIR IDEAS IN WRITING BY THE END OF AUGUST. WOULD THE PRESIDENT SEE THAT SYRIAN CONTRIBUTION WOULD BE ON TIME?

3. ASSAD REPLIED ALONG THE LINES OF WHAT HE HAD SAID TO YOU AT AUGUST 4 MEETING: HE DID NOT SEE HOW HIS IDEAS COULD BE PUT DOWN IN GREATER CLARITY THAN HE HAD ALREADY DEFINED THEM ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS. SAID I WAS SURE THIS WAS THE CASE, BUT UNDERLINED OUR GREAT INTEREST IN RECEIVING THEM IN WRITING AND DIRECTLY FROM SYRIA. THE SECRETARY
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AND NOW CARTER HIMSELF HAD STRESSED HOW CRITICALLY IMPORTANT IT IS FOR ALL PARTIES TO COMMIT THEIR IDEAS TO PAPER AS FULLY AND QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE. SPEAKING PERSONALLY, I SUGGESTED ASSAD MAY FIND IT EASIER TO PRESENT HIS THOUGHT, WHETHER IN ACTUAL TREATY LANGUAGE OR IN A SERIES OF DETAILED POINTS, THAN WILL PRIMIN BEGIN, WHO MAY BE RELUCTANT AT THIS JUNCTURE TO SPELL OUT SOME OF HIS IDEAS. THIS OBSERVATION SEEMED TO HAVE POSITIVE EFFECT AND ASSAD INDICATED OUR REQUEST GAVE HIM NO PROBLEM IN PRINCIPLE. PRESIDENT SAID KHADDAM WOULD BE BACK FROM A PRIVATE VISIT OUTSIDE SYRIA WITHIN THE NEXT DAY OR TWO AND THEY WOULD DISCUSS THIS MATTER FURTHER.

4. ASSAD THEN PAUSED AND SAID HE WAS PUZZLED BY THE STRESS IN PRESIDENT CARTER'S MESSAGE ON THE TERM "PEACE TREATY." SYRIA IS ACCUSTOMED TO TALKING ABOUT A "PEACE AGREEMENT" NOT A TREATY. I REMINDED ASSAD THAT YOU HAD SEVERAL TIMES USED THE WORD "TREATY" IN YOUR LAST TWO MEETINGS HERE. QUOTED BACK TO HIM THE FIRST DRAFT PRINCIPLE WHICH YOU HAD PRESENTED TO HIM THAT "THE GOAL OF NEGOTIATION IS A COMPREHENSIVE PEACE SETTLEMENT EMBODIED IN PEACE TREATIES." ASSAD MULLED THIS OVER WITH EVIDENT DISCOMFORT AND THEN

INSTRUCTED HIS INTERPRETER TO HAVE THE PRESIDENCY'S LEGAL
ADVISOR EXAMINE THE QUESTION AND INFORM HIM ON WHAT, IF ANY,
SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE THERE IS BETWEEN AN "AGREEMENT"
AND A "TREATY."

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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /001 W
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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4463

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5. ISRAELI INTENTIONS RE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES:

ASSAD THEN DISCOURSED ABOUT ISRAELI ANNOUNCE-
MENT THAT GOI WOULD PROVIDE SERVICES IN THE WEST/BANK
GAZE IDENTICAL TO THOSE IN ISRAEL. HE SAID SOMBERLY THAT
HE INTERPRETED THIS AS ONE MORE STEP IN THE UNFOLDING
ISRAELI PLAN TO ABSORB THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES. LATEST
ISRAELI ANNOUNCEMENT HAD BEEN UNSPECIFIC, PROBABLY DELIBERATELY
SO. IT WAS A TACTIC TO ACCUSTOM THE WORLD
TO AN ISRAELI TAKEOVER. HE REFERRED TO SUNDAY'S COMMENTS
ABOUT THE WEST BANK BY THE GOI SPOKESMAN ECHOING BEGIN'S
INITIAL POST-ELECTION STATEMENT THAT THIS WAS "LIBERATED
AND NOT OCCUPIED" TERRITORY. IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE TO CREDIT
THE ISRAELIS WITH AIM JUST OF "SERVING" THE PALESTINIANS. WHETHER
OR NOT THE LATEST ANNOUNCEMENT WAS DESIGNED FOR PRESENT JUST TO
ENCOURAGE FURTHER JEWISH MIGRATION INTO THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES, IT
WAS DEFINITELY A STEP TOWARDS ANNEXATION. I ASKED HOW THE
PRESIDENT RECONCILED HIS ASSUMPTION THAT THE ISRAELIS INTENDED
TO ANNEX THESE TERRITORIES WITH THE DEMOGRAPHIC REALITY THAT
ANNEXATION WOULD ENORMOUSLY MAGNIFY ISRAEL'S DIFFICULTIES
IN REMAINING A JEWISH STATE. ASSAD SAID HE HAD CONCLUDED
THAT THE ISRAELIS INTEND EVENTUALLY TO FORCE ARAB INHABI-
TANTS OF OCCUPIED TERRITORIES TO LEAVE. "I AM FORCED TO ASSUME THIS
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IN THE LIGHT OF THEIR REPEATED DEMONSTRATIONS OF AN AGGRESSIVE MENTALITY."

6. LEBANON:

WE THEN DISCUSSED CONDITIONS IN SOUTH LEBANON. REFERRING TO PRESIDENT CARTER'S LETTER, I SAID WE HOPED TO LEARN MORE ABOUT SYRIAN PLANS TO ENFORCE THE CEASE-FIRE THERE.

ANY COMMENTS HE MIGHT HAVE ABOUT SYRIA'S PERCEPTIONS OF ISRAELI, PALESTINIAN AND LEBANESE INTENTIONS WOULD ALSO BE WELCOME. ADDRESSING THE QUESTION OF ISRAELI INTENTIONS, ASSAD HE AWARE OF NO NEW FACTS WHICH WOULD CHANGE HIS ESTIMATE AS OUTLINED TO YOU LAST WEEK. ISRAEL WANTS TO KEEP SOUTH LEBANON STIRRED UP. TO THIS END, IT SEEKS TO CREATE PROBLEMS FOR PUBLIC DEBATE AT THIS DELICATE STAGE AND THEN USE THOSE ALLEGED PROBLEMS AS A PRETEXT TO OCCUPY LAND.

ASSAD SAID HE IS UNSURE WHEN ISRAEL INTENDS TO MOVE MILITARILY INTO SOUTH LEBANON BUT MAINTAINED HE IS CONVINCED THAT THERE ARE THE ABOVE TWO STAGES IN THE ISRAELI PLAN AND THAT THEY ARE CLOSELY INERRELATED.

7. I THEN ASKED HIM TO COMMENT ON THE PRESS ANNOUNCEMENT THAT IMPLEMENTATION OF THE THIRD STAGE OF THE SHTAURA AGREEMENT WOULD BE DELAYED. ASSAD REACTED IMMEDIATELY, SAYING FLATLY THAT HE HAD NOT BEEN INFORMED OF ANY DELAY IN IMPLEMENTATION. IF THERE HAD BEEN A DAY OR TWO SLIPPAGE, THIS WAS INSIGNIFICANT. EVERYTHING IS GOING AHEAD IN ACCORD WITH THE SHTAURA AGREEMENT. AT THIS POINT HE EXCUSED HIMSELF AND WENT TO A TELEPHONE AT THE OTHER END OF THE LIVING ROOM WHERE HE CALLED AN UNIDENTIFIED AIDE (I ASSUME IT WAS EITHER CHIEF OF STAFF SHIHABI OR AIR FORCE

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INTELLIGENCE CHIEF AL-KHOULI). I OVERHEARD HIM SAY HE WISHED TO KNOW ABOUT ANY PROBLEMS AFFECTING BEGINNING OF THE THIRD STAGE. HE ASKED IF IT HAD BEEN EXPECTED TO START THIRD STAGE ON A SPECIFIC DAY AND REPEATED ALOUD THE ANSWER APPARENTLY GIVEN THAT IMPLEMENTATION WAS EXPECTED TO START "IN A WEEK." HE THEN RETURNED TO ME, STATING EMPHATICALLY THAT:

A. THERE WAS NO DELAY;

B. THE PALESTINIANS ARE READY TO IMPLEMENT THE SHTAURA AGREEMENT;

C. THE SYRIANS AND PALESTINIANS HAD LEFT IT UP TO SARKIS TO PICK THE PRECISE DAY FOR COMMENCEMENT OF THE THIRD STAGE. LUARKIS HAD NOT YET DONE SO.

D. IT WAS AGREED AT SHTAURA THAT IN PICKING A DATE FOR IMPLEMENTATION, SARKIS WOULD ALLOW THE PALESTINIANS "A FEW DAYS TO ARRANGE MATTERS FROM THEIR SIDE."

8. I SAID THAT WE WERE GETTING A MESSAGE FROM THE LEBANESE LEADERSHIP THAT THEY BELIEVED THEY NEEDED AN EFFECTIVE SYRIAN ACTION TO STOP PALESTINIAN MILITARY ACTIVITY AND TO MOVE THE PALESTINIANS BACK BEFORE THEY CAN MOVE THEIR OWN FORCES INTO THE AREA. ASSAD REPLIED THAT IF THIS MESSAGE SUPPOSEDLY CAME FROM SARKIS, IT COULD NOT BE A CORRECT REPRESENTATION OF SARKIS' VIEWS. THE SHTAURA AGREEMENT, HE STRESSED, HAD OUTLINED EACH STAGE OF IMPLEMENTATION IN DETAIL AND THE OVERALL TIME FRAME, AS FINALLY AGREED UPON, HAD BEEN SUGGESTED BY THE LEBANESE LEADERSHIP ITSELF. WHEN THE PALESTINIANS EVACUATE PARTICULAR SPOTS, THEY WANT TO HAND THOSE SITES OVER TO THE LEGAL LEBANESE AUTHORITIES; OTHERWISE THEY WOULD EFFECTIVELY BE HANDING THEIR STRONG POINTS OVER TO ISRAEL. I SAID I WAS NOT SUGGESTING THAT THERE

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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /001 W
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4464

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WAS ANYTHING IN THE SHTAURA AGREEMENT SPECIFICALLY SAYING THAT THE LEBANESE LEADERSHIP WANTED SOME FURTHER SYRIAN ACTION. THIS

WAS AT THE VRY LEAST HOWEVER A LOGICAL DEDUCTION ABOUT THE LEADERSHIP'S CURRENT THINKING, GIVEN THE LEBANESE RELUCTANCE TO MOVE THEIR FORCES SOUTHWARDS. THEY CLEARLY WANTED NO RISK OF CONFLICT WITH THE PALESTINIANS. ASSAD REPLIED THAT WHAT WE WERE HEARING FROM THE LEADERSHIP WAS NOT WHAT SYRIA WAS HEARING FROM SARKIS AND HIS ADVISORS. SARKIS' PROBLEM DERIVES FROM LACK OF TROOPS, NOT FROM PALESTINIAN MILITARY ACTIVITY. SARKIS IS AWARE, ASSAD ADDED, THAT HE MAY FACE A PROBLEM WITH ARMED LEBANESE ELEMENTS IN THE SOUTH SINCE SOME OF THEM WILL NOT WELCOME THE ARRIVAL OF REGULAR LEBANESE FORCES. THE PALESTINIANS ARE NOT A PROBLEM, HE ASSERTED, BECAUSE, UNDER SHTAURA, THEY MUST MOVE TO CERTAIN AGREED UPON AREAS. THE REALITY IS THAT THE CURRENT MILITARY ACTIVITY IN THE SOUTH IS COMING FROM THE ISRAELI NOT THE PALESTINIAN SIDE. NO LESS THAN 420 ARTILLERY SHELLS IMPACTED IN 24 HOURS AGAINST A SINGLE SMALL HILL DURING THE LAST DAYS. THESE WERE ISRAELI SHELLS, NEITHER LEBANESE NOR PALESTINIAN.

9. I SAID WE DID NOT PRETEND TO HAVE PRECISE DETAILS OF
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ALL OPERATIONS IN SOUTH LEBANON WHERE WE WERE NOT PHYSICALLY PRESENT. BUT WAS ASSAD HIMSELF ABSOLUTELY POSITIVE THAT ALL PALESTINIANS WERE OBEYING THE CENTRAL PALESTINIAN COMMAND AND ABSTAINING FROM MILITARY ACTIVITY? ASSAD HESITATED AND THEN ACKNOWLEDGED THAT "PERHAPS SMALL ELEMENTS WERE OUT OF CONTROL" BUT THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY HE MAINTAINED WERE IN A DEFENSIVE POSITION. THE PALESTINIAN LEADERSHIP HAD ASSURED DAMASCUS OF THIS. THE PALESTINIANS, HE REPEATED, ARE READY TO CARRY OUT THE SHTAURA AGREEMENT AND INDEED ARE IN A HURRY TO DO SO.

10. ASSAD THEN SAID HE BELIEVED THE MESSAGE WE WERE APPARENTLY RECEIVING FROM THE LEBANESE ABOUT THE NEED FOR SOME NEW EFFECTIVE SYRIAN ACTION MUST BE COMING TO US FROM THE LEBANESE FRONT OF CHAMOUN, FRANGIE AND JAMAYAL. HE SAID SMILINGLY, "THEY ARE ALL OUR FRIENDS, DON'T MISTAKE THIS, BUT WE KNOW THERE IS NOTHING THEY WOULD LIKE BETTER THAN TO SEE ALL PALESTINIANS REMOVED TO ANOTHER PLANET. I CANNOT BELIEVE THAT WHAT YOU ARE HEARING IS COMING PERSONALLY FROM SARKIS." I SAID THAT I WAS NOT QUOTING SARKIS DIRECTLY BUT THIS MESSAGE WAS, INDEED, COMING TO US FROM THE LEBANESE LEADERSHIP. ASSAD MUSED THAT HE FOUND THIS VERY HARD TO UNDERSTAND, BECAUSE WHEN THE SHTAURA AGREEMENT WAS REACHED THE LEBANESE AUTHORITIES WERE DELIGHTED WITH THE TEXT AND THE OBLIGATIONS EACH PARTY HAD ASSUMED. THE LEBANESE AUTHORITIES HAD IN FACT BEEN AMAZED IT HAD PROVED POSSIBLE TO REACH AGREEMENT IN SHTAURA. I ASKED ASSAD IF I COULD THEN SUM UP HIS VIEWS AS BEING THAT:

A. THE PALESTINIANS ARE EAGER TO IMPLEMENT THE SHTAURA AGREEMENT,

B. THEY WILL WELCOME LEBANESE FORCES IN THE SOUTH,
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C. THEY ARE READY TO CEASE MILITARY ACTIVITY AGAINST ISRAEL.

ASSAD BALKED AND SAID HE COULD NOT AFFIRM THE LAST PART.

11. WE THEN DISCUSSED THE STAGE REACHED TO DATE IN FORMING A NEW LEBANESE ARMY AND AGREED THAT HOWEVER MUCH OF A FICTION THIS ARMY MIGHT BE, IT BEHOVED ALL OF US TO ACT AS IF IT HAD SUBSTANCE AND ITS UNITS SHOULD BE MOVED SOUTHWARDS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. ASSAD REPLIED, "THAT IS EXACTLY HOW WE SEE THE LEBANESE ARMY AND HOW WE ARE BEHAVING TOWARDS IT." "ON THE OTHER HAND," PRESIDENT CONTINUED, "IF THE LEBANESE AUTHORITIES WANT SYRIAN FORCES IN THE SOUTH, WE ARE READY TO SEND THEM AND HAVE TOLD THIS TO ARKIS. I AM PERSUADED THAT BOTH THE PALESTINIANS AND LEBANESE WOULD WELCOME OUR SENDING IN SYRIAN TROOPS SINCE THE SHTAURA AGREEMENT CALLS FOR TROOPS IN THE SOUTH AND THE LEBANESE CANNOT PROVIDE THEM." I INTERJECTED FIRMLY THAT I WANTED TO BE ABSOLUTELY CLEAR ON THIS POINT. THE MESSAGE WE WERE GETTING WAS IN NO SENSE A REQUEST FOR SYRIAN TROOPS BUT RATHER FOR SYRIAN POLITICAL ACTION TO REIN IN THE PALESTINIANS AND KEEP THEIR TROOPS QUIET. ASSAD THEN AFFIRMED, "THERE WILL BE NO RISK FROM THE PALESTINIANS. THE ONLY RISK FROM THE ARAB SIDE IN THAT AREA COMES FROM THOSE LEBANESE WHO COOPERATE WITH ISRAEL AND ARE LIKELY TO REFUSE TO OBEY THE LEGITIMATE LEBANESE AUTHORITY."

12. HE NOTED HE HAD DISCUSSED THE ACTIVITIES OF MAJOR GEORGE HADDAD WITH CHAMOUN, JAMAYAL, ET AL, LAST WEEK IN DAMASCUS. HE HAD CONDEMNED HADDAD'S BEHAVIOR ON THE GROUNDS THAT ANY ARAB COOPERATION WITH ISRAEL IS TREASON. HE HAD MADE THE POINT THAT PALESTINIAN CLASHES WITH LEBANESE IN NO WAY JUSTIFIED HADDAD'S SUBSEQUENT DEALINGS WITH THE ISRAELIS. I ASKED WHAT CHAMOUN'S REACTION HAD BEEN. ASSAD REPLIED SIMPLY, THE "THEY ALL TOOK A POSITIVE ATTITUDE ON THIS QUESTION."

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13. IN CONCLUSION, THE PRESIDENT SAID WE SHOULD FEEL NO CONCERN THAT THE SHTAURA AGREEMENT WOULD NOT BE FULLY IMPLEMENTED. IT WAS NOW UP TO SARKIS TO PICK THE DATE TO LAUNCH IMPLEMENTATION OF THE THIRD STAGE. NO DEADLINE HAD BEEN MISSED AND ANY TALK TO THIS EFFECT WAS MISLEADING PRESS SPECULATION.

14. I TOOK LEAVE SAYING THAT I KNEW PRESIDENT CARTER LOOKED FORWARD TO MAINTAINING A CLOSE AND COOPERATIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH ASSAD IN THE PEACE PROCESS. ASSAD SAID HE LOOKED FORWARD TO THE SAME. HE SAID HE WAS CONCERNED, HOWEVER, THAT THE EXTRAORDINARILY INTRANSIGENT STANDS ISRAEL HAD TAKEN IN RECENT DAYS WERE AIMED AT PULLING THE AMERICAN POSITION CLOSER TO THAT OF ISRAEL. I PREDICTED THAT IF THAT WAS THE ISRAELI TACTIC IT WOULD NOT SUCCEED. ADDED THAT IF HE WERE CONVINCED OF HIS POINT, IT WAS MORE THAN EVER TO THE ARAB ADVANTAGE TO COOPERATE CLOSELY WITH U.S. IN THE SEARCH FOR PEACE. ASSAD NODDED AND ASKED THAT I FORWARD HIS WARMEST REGARDS TO YOU AND PRESIDENT CARTER.

15. COMMENT: I FELT ASSAD WAS BEING CANDID WITH ME IN OUTLINING HIS VIEW OF THE PROBLEMS IN SOUTH LEBANON. HIS PHONE CALL FOR INFORMATION ABOUT LATEST DEVELOPMENTS SEEMED
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COMPLETELY SPONTANEOUS. HE ACCEPTS THERE ARE SOME TROUBLEMAKERS AMONG LEBANESE AND PALESTINIAN EXTREMISTS IN SOUTH LEBANON BUT APPEARS CONFIDENT THESE CAN BE CONTROLLED. THE WILD CARD AS HE SEES IT IS ISRAEL.

16. I WILL FOLLOW UP WITH KHADDAM IN NEXT FEW DAYS ON THE SUBJECT OF TREATY LANGUAGE.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: AGREEMENTS, POLITICAL SETTLEMENT, PALESTINIANS, TROOP DEPLOYMENT, CAT-B
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 17-Aug-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977DAMASC05276
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: P840076-0231
Format: TEL
From: DAMASCUS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770854/aaaabtmw.tel
Line Count: 439
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 95306b59-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NODS
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: NODIS
Page Count: 8
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: NODIS
Reference: 77 STATE 192565
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 26-Mar-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1580759
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: MESSAGE TO PRESIDENT ASSAD FROM PRESIDENT CARTER
TAGS: PDEV, PBOR, SY, US, IS, LE, (ASSAD, HAFIZ)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/95306b59-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009